

Father Rodriguez's Tercentenary

BY GEORGE O'NEILL, S.J.

Reprinted, with Leave, from the "Irish Monthly."

VERY noiselessly has passed over our heads the third centenary of the author of "The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection"; but we may reckon that it had a more heartfelt meaning for thousands of souls than many a commemoration that is carried off with harangues, trumpets and fireworks. Few men who have lived during the past three centuries can have exercised by their writings a more widespread influence than has Father Alphonsus Rodriguez. Few authors have won a success so uncontested and so uninterrupted. These statements may seem to one or other reader rather wild; he has, perhaps, never even heard of the book! It is quite true that this is not a book known to everyone—not even to every good Catholic. It is the book of a particular *milieu*. But then that *milieu* is—thank God!—very large; it is very wide-extended, and it perpetually renews itself. "The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection" is the most generally accepted guide for those who are entering upon the paths of the perfect life, especially if they have bound themselves to that life by the vows of religion. For the past 300 years no exposition of its great theme has been so thumbed, so pored over, by the members—especially in the earlier stages of their training—of Religious Orders, Congregations, and communities, both of men and women, beginning with the Order to which Father Alphonsus himself belonged, and

to the formation of whose younger subjects he devoted the labors of his life. It has been the vade-mecum of the novice and the seminarist; the Baedeker, one might say, of the young soul that has turned from the broad roads of the world and uplifted its eyes towards the mountains; those mountains whence, indeed, cometh surely unseen help, but along whose steep and cloud-swept paths the climber will stretch out an eager hand to the wise, vigilant and faithful guide.

If we ask whence and why this remarkable success and popularity, we may reply that it is eminently a case of the golden mean. There is probably not a single one of the qualities mainly desired in a manual of spiritual direction which cannot be found in a highly, even much higher, degree outside the volumes of Rodriguez. Not only would no one turn to his pages for the mystic insight of a Teresa, the theology of an Aquinas, the ardor of a Bernard, the intellectual vision of a Newman; but one might easily find him surpassed by far lesser lights than these in particular gifts and special attractions. Nor, again, does he shine by a merely negative perfection; the poor glory of freedom from all faults and blemishes: a point on which we shall presently say something more. No; his popularity and wide usefulness are the fruits and reward of something quite different: of a golden moderation, *aurea mediocritas*. His distinction is that of a writer who not only gleans from nearly every part of the wide field, covered by his predecessors, but who also succeeds in combining, within limits, their special merits and values. "Within limits," we say; in this case the phrase hardly implies any depreciation, for those limits themselves have given "The Practice" a kind of additional merit. It is those limits which precisely accommo-

date the book to the needs and capacity of its average reader. They make it the book of every religious soul; they fit it to be the friend and counsellor of the least gifted as well as the most gifted who has lent ear to the word "If thou wilt be perfect. . . ." In matter and manner alike, Rodriguez is central, intelligible, approachable. In the greatest of sciences, he is the greatest of *vulgarisateurs*.

To this peculiar and happy result all the circumstances of his life contributed. After boyhood spent at Valladolid, his birthplace, and after studies at Salamanca, he entered at the age of nineteen, in 1537, the Society of Jesus, then in the third year of its existence. He must have been a singularly diligent student, for in that nineteenth year of his age he had already achieved five years of grammar-studies, three of philosophy and two of theology, and won his degree of Bachelor of Arts. As a novice he became noted for application to prayer and books, and for a disposition to retirement which in later life was once or twice noted as excessive. It is related that in his noviceship days he appeared at first timid and hesitating in the exercises of pulpit oratory which he, in common with his brethren, was called on to undertake, but that this awkwardness disappeared and gave place permanently to a marked ease and facility when, in accordance with the advice of a certain devout Father Alcaraz, he threw himself zealously into pulpit defenses of the doctrine, then contested by many, of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception. He never, however, became eminent, though he rendered good services, in preaching or in the other more external ministries of the Society. It was in the confessional, in private direction, in the chair of the spiritual teacher, especially among his own

brethren, that his characteristic gifts and mission became evident. At the remarkably early age of twenty-six he was appointed master of novices, and in the discharge of this important function he spent the greater part of his remaining years. With this was constantly associated the duty of addressing every week spiritual exhortations to the members of the entire community to which he belonged. Thus came to grow up under his pen all that we now read in the twenty-four treatises and three volumes which compose his unique and solitary work, as we may well describe it, for his other published works are very few, brief, and unimportant. Without haste, without rest, he thought out, spoke and transcribed his counsels, examples, arguments and appeals, arranging and rearranging them until they assumed at last the shape of a singularly well-ordered, well-rounded *Summa*. He had even the opportunity of amending it after its *début* in print, for he survived that event by ten years. Those later years were spent in retirement and in the patient endurance of great sufferings. In 1593, however, he had been honored by his Province with the charge of representing it in a General Congregation of the Order which met at Rome, and soon after that event he was appointed by the Father General, Claudius Acquaviva, visitor of the (same) Province of Andalusia. A different sort of honor which is said to have been his is that of having trained for a time, as master of novices, the young Francis Suarez. He lived to the age of seventy-eight, giving in his closing years and last illness admirable examples of the patience and conformity to the will of God of which he had written in the longest, best, and most characteristic of all his treatises. He breathed his last on February 21, 1616, in the Andalusian capital, Seville;

and many were heard to say that his end and his life had been those of a saint.

Thus then did Father Rodriguez come to be a man of one book. Of that book, in its original Spanish form, four editions appeared during the writer's life-time: since then there have been over thirty others, apart from extracts and compendiums. As to other languages, the whole work or parts of it have appeared in Arabic, Annamite, Armenian, Basque, Bohemian, Croatian, Chinese, English, Flemish, Dutch, French, Greek, Latin, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Russian, Tagal (Philippines), and Tamul. Sixteen editions have appeared in Germany and Austria; forty-six in Italy. Into French the book has been translated six different times. The last and best effort was that of the Abbé Régnier Desmarais of the French Academy, begun in 1673. From this, in the main, has been taken the English version, which, however, has been a gradual growth, the Treatise on Prayer having appeared in English at St. Omer as early as 1612, and the last revisions having been made by Father Treacy Clarke, S.J., a gifted Irishman who became master of novices at Roehampton in 1845 and again in 1860.

As to other proofs of posthumous celebrity, we will only just touch upon one, the compliment of imitation and plagiarism which was paid to him, as to many other distinctly "Popish" writers, by English Protestants of name and reputation. This went so far in the seventeenth century that it elicited from John Dryden a highly eulogistic reference to the Spanish Jesuit. In "The Hind and the Panther," the former beast, representing the Catholic Church, thus meets some vaunts of the Panther, who stands for Protestantism:

Now, last, your sons a double pæan sound;
A Treatise of Humility is found.
'Tis found; but better had it ne'er been sought,
Than thus in Protestant procession brought.
The famed original through Spain is known,
Rodriguez' work, my celebrated son;
Which yours by ill translating made his own,
Concealed its author and usurped the name,
The basest and ignoblest theft of fame,
My altars kindled first that living coal:
Restore, or practise better, what you stole.¹

So widespread a popularity, making such unexpected conquests, was the more remarkable as it was purchased by no showy superficial gifts. Father Rodriguez paid little attention to his style. Even grammatical slips may be detected in his original pages. Yet there have not been wanting good judges of his own country and tongue who have highly praised his "pure Castilian," the un-failing simplicity, ease, clearness and grace of his diction.

The Abbé Régnier Desmarais went therefore, too far, when, like a true Louis-Quatorze academician, he declared the idiom of Rodriguez "careless and inelegant," and thought himself at liberty, in the supposed interests of a refined French version, to take liberties with the text. The resulting inaccuracy and flatness is intensified in our English re-translation where an antique groundwork has been dulled, not improved, by revisers of Johnsonian and Victorian ideas. It were greatly to be desired that the present centenary occasion might give the needed

¹It will be noted that Dryden accents the name on the second syllable. This is, strictly speaking, incorrect. Like the bulk of Spanish words ending in a consonant it is stressed on the last syllable. The 'u' has no separate sound. The name, then, is pronounced something like 'Rodreegaith.'

impetus towards the production of a new, more scholarly, and more literary translation from the Castilian original, and, we would add, of something more, of an edition which should profit by the lights of someone familiar with theological and spiritual science and acquainted with matters of modern provenance which Father Rodriguez could not possibly have known, of an edition which, while respecting scrupulously the original text, should add here and there the light of judicious annotations.

For it is hardly needful to say that other flaws than those of mere style have been noticed in this much studied guide. It were impossible that any such book should please all alike, or, after the lapse of three centuries, should appear to our age just what it appeared to the men of ten generations ago. Every age develops its own ideas, views, and tastes; nor let it be urged that asceticism and mystical theology must escape this law, as being too supernal in essence to be pulled hither and thither by the moon of fashion. For this would be to forget how vast and complex they are, and how imperfect and incomplete must be the grasp which any human intelligence can gain upon them. Then they have their human fringes, subsidiary matters where the Holy Ghost will not interfere with human fallibility. Take, for example, points of history or of biology. In the first rank of Father Rodriguez's failings would probably be placed, in this age of keen historical criticism, the easy-going readiness with which he, like others before and during his time, accepts and repeats tales from all manner of sources, quite untroubled, apparently, as to their authenticity. To us the names of Smaragdus, Cæsarius and Surius are no sufficient warrant for an otherwise improbable story; we have learnt that "The Spiritual Meadow"

and "The Flowers of Examples" are collections of pious fiction mingled with an uncertain modicum of history. To the Middle Ages, whose traditions our ascetic so largely represented, these considerations were either not present, or, if they were, appeared matters of little moment: to us authenticity looks a matter of quite primary importance.

Intimately connected with these historical doubts is another quarrel which has been raised against Father Rodriguez, that as to the remarkable inequality in value of his numerous examples and anecdotes. They are, in fact, good, bad, and indifferent. Some of them correspond curiously ill to the moderation and good sense of the doctrinal passages they are meant to illustrate. Some, though good in themselves, we could willingly sacrifice, could we see in their vacant places a more abundant exposition of doctrine, law, and principle.

Of these faults, and of, probably, all the others that can fairly be charged against Father Rodriguez, we may find sufficient exemplification in what is, we believe, the least admirable of all his treatises, that entitled "On Disorderly Affections for Our Relations." Here are involved, critically involved, some of the biggest and most interesting questions as to the queen-virtue, the supreme law, of charity. Might we not reasonably expect that our ascetic would begin by giving us, however briefly, some clear and solid notions as to what are "orderly" and what are "disorderly" affections? But he does nothing of the kind. Or, to be quite just, he devotes to the explanation of "orderly" affections just two lines and a word out of his seven chapters. He has no space or inclination to discuss St. Paul's tremendous text: "If any man have not care of his own, especially of those of his

own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (*I. Tim. V*), or to enter into relevant theological and practical questions such as these: "Whether natural relationship is to be preferred to spiritual? Whether it is more ancient, more unchangeable, more meritorious of gratitude? Whether relatives should be preferred to non-relatives, even when the latter are holier?" It is no part of my task to enter into these questions: I will only remark here that Father Suarez, from whose treatise on charity I have taken them (*De Car. Disp. IX, Sec. IV*) answers them all in the affirmative. They obviously therefore raise a number of critical questions for the religious who, following the higher laws of charity, breaks the ordinary bonds of family life. But those problems are not even alluded to by the novice-master of Suarez. On the contrary, he starts off at once with the proposition. "How much it imports a religious to abstain from paying visits to his relatives," and so he proceeds from exhortation to exhortation, giving us some excellent practical instructions, very little definite doctrine, and a great number of stories. And such stories! There is the tale of the Abbot Apollo, who refused to leave his prayers to help his brother to pull an ox out of a quagmire. There is that of the hermit who was seized with a violent epileptic fit, as a visible Divine judgment, in consequence of his having started out to convert to a better life his forsaken wife and son. There is, to end and crown all, the example of the novice who left to utter destitution a devoted mother, "who had spent all she had in maintaining him in his studies, and now found herself reduced to extreme poverty": the novice's wavering resolve being confirmed by a miraculous voice from a crucifix.

These examples are taken from ancient legends, and the resource of not believing them is always open to those who do not like them. We might be inclined to allow more weight to certain modern instances; yet in these also Father Rodriguez has not been always happy. He tells us of St. Francis Xavier's declining to turn aside to visit his mother though he was starting presently for the Indies and the paternal mansion lay only ten miles aside from his route. It has been shown, however, that that story is baseless, the Saint's mother having died some years previously. He does not tell us how the Blessed Peter Faber on one occasion turned a long way out of his route to visit an ailing aunt, and how Heaven rewarded the kindly act with a miracle. St. Francis Borgia and St. Aloysius are cited as having shown entire indifference to the affairs, especially temporal, of their relatives. Yet an impartial examination of their lives and correspondence might lead us to a very different view of their behavior. No doubt Father Rodriguez's instances bring before us a prudence, an elevation of mind, an unworldliness, of which those two Saints were in the highest degree models. But, side by side with his instances, let us set here down a page, slightly abbreviated, from the monograph by Father Suau, in "Les Saints" series, which shows us the soul and conduct of St. Francis Borgia in quite another light:

Sanctity does not extinguish lawful affections: it rather gives them new ardor in making them supernatural and we disfigure the character of Francis Borgia as a religious, if we ascribe to him an indifference towards his family which was never his. To his brothers and sons in Spain he wrote frequently. He valued their letters and sometimes complained when these came too rarely. Every courier that left Gandia, Madrid, Toro, brought him missives from his son,

Carlos; his son-in-law, the Count of Lerma; his daughter, Juana; his sisters, Poor Clares in Gandia and Madrid; from his other children, Juan, Alvaro, Fernando, Alonso; from his brother; from old servants whom he never forgot. With letters, came sometimes boxes of preserves, of sweet confections, of orange-flower-water. For such gifts, to him personally useless, Francis always sent thanks, with requests that they might come no more. He follows, with interest, the success in studies of his younger brother, Thomas; the feats in arms of Galceran de Borgia, Commandant of Oran; the brilliant career of his son, Juan, Ambassador of Spain at Lisbon. He is informed of the birth of little grandchildren and great grandchildren, and sends his felicitations. All write to him with deep respect, mingled with confiding affection; they beg his advice; they rely on his prayers; while he interests himself in all their concerns. He sends them presents; Don Carlos, on one occasion, acknowledges the receipt from him of a map of the world, a watch, and a treatise on hunting.

And all this when St. Francis had on his shoulders the government of the whole Society of Jesus! Truly, this picture does not seem like the grim Father of the Desert whom so many hagiographers have vied in painting. . . .

Our author's generous mind would certainly have given us counsels differently colored on many and many a point, had he known the gentler and sweeter spirit that has been poured out abundantly upon the Church since the days of the Thebaid and Luxeuil and Alvernia, of the walled-up recluses, even of Reformation and Renaissance battles: had he known Philip Neri, and Francis de Sales, and the "Little Flower" of Lisieux; the numerous Congregations devoted to external labors of charity and mercy; the restoration of frequent Communion; the unexampled honors paid to the Blessed Sacrament; had he beheld, over-shining and interpenetrating all, the revealed radiance of the Divine Heart itself, everywhere piercing

and moving to repentance the most hardened hearts. Not destroying any truth or any force which hitherto had made for righteousness, but necessitating new readings of many an old lesson, these works of the finger of God have come upon us, Providential resources brought forth for souls of softer fiber than the old, for conflicts against more subtle and insidious evils, for gentler, homelier ways of enlarging the Kingdom of Heaven. Surely, all human wisdom is fallible and limited! How wise was St. Paul when he paused ecstatically before the tremendous abyss of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! Should not we be unjust to our admirable sixteenth-century master of novices if we wondered, reproachfully, that he has not given us the complete wisdom of all the Divine ages? And shall we not be unjust to ourselves if we neglect opportunities of widening our knowledge and grasp of the spiritual life by studying, with his book, the works of other well-warranted guides?

We have left ourselves but little space wherein to dwell, as were just and fitting, upon the peculiar merits of Father Rodriguez's work. Perhaps it would suffice to quote and apply to it the well-known saying: *securus judicat orbis terrarum*. Three centuries of unbroken success among those best qualified to prime our judgments; what panegyric can equal this? Very briefly, therefore with more reference to the regrettably imperfect medium with which the English version provides us of becoming acquainted with the genuine work, may we note in conclusion the merits which have at all times been specially remarked in "The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection." First comes the clearness, order and intelligibility which pervade the work in gen-

eral and in all its parts; the absence of cloudiness and confusion, of false divisions and tedious repetitions. The next is the readiness and naturalness, rarely if ever surpassed by any author, in the citation of apropos texts and illustrations to prove every thesis and enforce every lesson. (2) Then there is the remarkable combination, considering the work as a whole, of theoretical solidity with a full appreciation of practical needs and difficulties. Finally, there is the gift of bringing home theory and exhortation to the mind and heart of every, even the humblest, reader. This last, as we have already indicated, is the supreme and singular praise due to Father Rodriguez. He possesses a conjoint power of exposition, exhortation, and familiar appeal. Like the Gospel itself, his message, while telling of things high enough for the ablest and the wisest, condescends to the simple and ignorant. Again, he is almost completely free of that allegorical and symbolical mysticism which had such a fascination for his predecessors and contemporaries, but of which the modern mind has become so impatient. Indeed, he has little of mysticism in any close sense of the word: and with this deficiency he has been occasionally taxed by neo-mystics of recent date. But his gifts and his mission were totally different from those of a Teresa or a John of the Cross, of a Bonaventure or a Catherine. It

(2) The industrious zeal of a Spanish editor has given us the following statistics as to Rodriguez's quotations: There are, in "The Practice," 906 texts from Holy Scripture, 271 from St. Augustine, 258 from St. Bernard, 171 from St. Gregory the Great, 144 from St. Jerome, 115 from St. Basil. Among non-patristic authorities, St. Bonaventure predominates with 95 quotations; next comes Cassian with 76. Of Lives of Saints, that of St. Anthony, by St. Athanasius, is most often referred to.

was his function to come down to the man without wings, to wave no wings in his face, but to persuade and encourage him to use his own natural feet for the great ascent, and to take as stepping-stones the circumstances of his plain daily life. His concern is "practice." Suspicious of the emotional or the visionary, of words and shows, he teaches mortification of passions, exactness to duties, fidelity in trifles—in short, he gives us the soul of Ignatius translated into the life of John Berchmans. His admirers may well find in his practical and realistic spirit much kinship with that of St. Paul, which would seem to have been a preferable thing to the tongues and prophecies, interpretations and revelations, of many Pauline contemporaries. In his simplicity, clearness, and popularity we may revere in him a teacher who has sat and learned at the feet of a higher Model than even St. Paul.

Cervantes

BY JOHN C. REVILLE, S.J.

ON the seventh of October, 1572, the galleys of John of Austria grappled with the Turkish fleet at Lepanto. When the signal for battle sounded, a Spanish volunteer lay tossing with fever on the ship *Marquesa*. In spite of his weakness, he buckled on his harness and fought all day. As the last battered Turkish war-galley disappeared on the horizon, he sank exhausted on the deck, the blood streaming from two arquebus wounds in his breast, and his left hand mangled and maimed for life. The gallant soldier was Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. The good right hand still left him was not yet to drop the rapier and was destined to write one of the world's great books, the adventures of the "Ingenious Knight of La Mancha," the immortal Don Quixote.

The crusader of Lepanto was born at Alcalá de Henares, October, 1547. His family was of good stock, but impoverished. Miguel was to endow it with a luster far surpassing that of its forbears. Of the lad's often asserted studies at Salamanca and with the Jesuits at Seville no conclusive proof has been advanced. The author of the "*Viaje del Parnaso*," the "*Galatea*" and the "*Don Quixote*" is evidently a well-read gentleman. He knows the books of chivalry, the "*Amadis de Gaul*" and the "*Palmerin of England*," has a sound knowledge of the Bible, has dipped below the surface into the classics and uses them effectively. He has mastered Italian and delights in Ariosto, Tasso, Pulci, and Boiardo. But he

is not a finished scholar like Ben Jonson in England, or his great countryman, Lope de Vega. He studied, however, one book thoroughly, in many types and bindings. He knew it from cover to cover, footnotes and text, with all its laughter and all its tears; the many-storied volume of the human heart.

About 1570 our Spaniard is in Italy, in the service of Cardinal Julio Acquaviva as usher or chamberlain. But he is not a man to dangle in idleness when the Holy Father Pope St. Pius V, Philip II and the Republic of Venice are signing a treaty, and John of Austria is mustering volunteers to rid the Mediterranean of the Sultan's raiders and drive back to their haunts the pirates of Tunis and Algiers. Cervantes drops his usher's staff, buys a musketoon and good Toledo blade, enlists in the Moncada regiment, gets his baptism of fire at Cyprus and the soldier's red christening at Lepanto. Even after that victorious day he still remains a soldier of the Cross. The camp with its battle-flags, the high-decked galleases rolling to the recoil of their guns and the swinging blows of foam-flecked waves fascinate him. And at Navarino, Tunis, Corfu, on islands and in bays, wherever a Turkish troop can be ambushed or a Moslem felucca boarded, "El Manco," the maimed hero of the Marquesa, is in the thickest of the fray.

But over the blare of the bugles, the call of the motherland is sounding in his heart. He must see once more father, mother, sunny Spain, the dear old streets of Alcalá. He has almost reached the goal from Sicily, when Arnaut Mami, the terror of the Mediterranean, captures the galley on which Cervantes and his friends had sailed and carries his prize in captivity to Algiers. Of that five years' slavery Don Miguel himself has given

us some account in the episode of Viedma, whose story is told in "Don Quixote."

Algiers was then likened to the nether pit, its ruler, Hassan Pasha, to the Prince of Darkness. Twenty-five thousand Christian slaves groaned there in iron bondage. A gallant soldier at Lepanto, Cervantes now showed himself a still nobler Christian at Algiers. His faith never wavered, his spirit was never broken. Threats, imprisonment, hunger, did not make him falter. He was the comforter, the guide, the spokesman of his fellow-prisoners. To while away their weary hours, he told them, no doubt, tales of giants and enchanted princesses, and by his songs and verse raised their hearts to thoughts of God's mercy, and of those two loves so dear to a Spaniard, the Blessed Eucharist and the Mother of God. If an attempt were made to escape by the prisoners, "El Manco" invariably conceived and planned it, and when caught boldly proclaimed himself the author. After long delay, ransom came at last. Cervantes never forgot the good Trinitarians who labored to secure his freedom.

In the autumn of 1580 he is back in Spain, but without fortune, sadder still, without friends. But five years' captivity, he tells us, had taught him life's great lesson, patience. He will wait for Fortune's knock at his door. So he unhooks his rusted sword, and ho! for the regiment and the wars again. With the exception of the almost insignificant offices of Victualler to the Fleet and Commissioner of the Royal Galleys, he filled no post of emolument or honor. In 1584, in spite of his poverty, he marries Catalina de Palacios Salazar. He now belongs to family and home, to literature and fame.

Pastorals then were popular. Sannazaro in Italy had set the fashion with his "Arcadia"; Jorge de Montemayor

and Gil Polo kept it up in Spain with their "Dianas." Cervantes followed with his "Galatea." But the will-o'-the-wisp of the drama ever allured him. He lacked, however, the dramatic instinct and never mastered the technique of the art. He lacked the power of rapid crystallization of thought and action, so necessary for the stage. Then Lope de Vega, the "monstruo de la naturaleza," nature's marvel, was rising to power and soon eclipsed his older rival. One of the plays, however, the "Numancia," has been greatly admired by Goethe, Shelley, the two Schlegels and our own Ticknor.

Fortune still shunned the poet's door. And it is almost painful to watch him battling in the honorable but unbusinesslike discharge of his commonplace duties against poverty. Cervantes buying oakum for the navy and haggling with middlemen for the price of wheat is "Pegasus in pound" surely, "a Samson at the mill" grinding corn! Yet he did not too loudly complain and his spirit was not broken. In 1603 he was summoned on business to Valladolid. In his traveling bags he carried the manuscript of the "Don Quixote." Poverty-stricken though he was, Miguel de Cervantes was to dower his country with a treasure to which the gold of Peruvian Incas would be as dross. In 1605 every Spaniard who could read was chuckling with delight over the Knight of La Mancha and Sancho Panza. Today the whole world is laughing still. And now and then laughter feels a tear trickling down its cheek! For humanity's illusions and stern realities and sorrows are in that immortal book. Are we not all Don Quixotes in some way, mad just a little south-south-west, or north-north-east? Who has not charged windmills, and been unhorsed in his encounter with those terrible giants, Life and Fact? With the exception of the

"Guzman de Alfarache" of Mateo Alemán, no book was so popular in Spain. It made money for the publishers, but not for the writer. Let us just mention our author's "Comedias y Entremeses" and the "Trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda," finished on the eve of his death, and the "Novelas Ejemplares," twelve masterpieces of the short story, published in 1613, and which Poe or "O. Henry" would have been glad to sign.

Cervantes had promised another volume of the Quixote. He was working upon it when a second part appeared under the name of Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda. Who is Avellaneda? The question remains unanswered. Lope de Vega has been suggested. Menendez y Pelayo, Hartzenbusch, Fitzmaurice-Kelly reject this view. Lope, though estranged for awhile from Cervantes, could never have lowered himself to the slanders and mockeries heaped by Avellaneda upon the maimed and impoverished soldier of Lepanto. The book had a good effect upon Cervantes. In 1616 he published his second part of what Macaulay has called the greatest novel in the world. The worn-out veteran could now put his foot in the stirrup of the Pale Horse and ride forth on his last journey. Fortified with the Sacraments of the parting wayfarer, repentant of his human frailties and sins, he died on April 23, just 300 years ago. Ever a loyal Catholic, he had been for some time a devout member of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, and at its meetings had often knelt by the side of his friend Quevedo and his former rival Lope de Vega. He had fought under the banner of the Cross at Lepanto; he was carried to his grave in the brown habit of a Tertiary of St. Francis. Some live romances, it has been said; others write them. To Cervantes it was given to accomplish both with a nobility and perfection seldom equaled.

Shakespeare's Religion

BY HERBERT THURSTON, S.J.

FIFTY-TWO years ago, in the month of April, 1864, the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth was kept with all due solemnity in his native town of Stratford-on-Avon. Seeing that so many of the dramatist's countrymen regarded him as the produce and almost the embodiment of the genius of English Protestantism, it was perhaps not unnatural that an effort should have been made to give a religious color to the celebration. "Shakespeare," said Archbishop R. C. Trench, who preached on the Sunday morning in Stratford parish church, "was born of the spirit of the Reformation." And later in the day Bishop Charles Wordsworth, reminding his hearers that within that very building Shakespeare had stood godfather to the infant son of his friend Walker, expatiated upon the enlightened insight with which the poet, in response to the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, must have pronounced the words of the baptismal service: "All this I steadfastly believe." By a man of his keen perceptions, the preacher argued, the act must have been viewed in its full significance as an equivalent profession of faith in the doctrines of the Church of England.

Undoubtedly the question of Shakespeare's religion is a difficult one, and I am tempted to protest against the assumption often made that he is necessarily to be classified as Catholic or Puritan or Anglican or Freethinker. Personally I believe that all four standpoints appealed to him in his different moods, but of these specified I am

also of opinion that Protestantism and Puritanism had the least hold upon his affections and that the most enduring religious influence of his life was Catholic. All the known facts, so far as I can interpret them, seem to point to some such analysis of his career as the following: First, that in his youth he had learned from his parents and associates to venerate the old Faith which in Queen Mary's time possessed exceptionally staunch adherents in Stratford. Secondly, that quitting his old home, he led for more than twenty years a wild and irregular life in London amid an atmosphere strongly impregnated with doubt and atheistic speculation. Thirdly, that like so many of his contemporaries he eventually adopted an attitude of indifferentism toward all religious questions, during which period he conformed just so far to the State religion as was needful to save himself from unpleasant consequences. Lastly, that he retained throughout a pronounced sympathy for Catholic belief and practice, a state of feeling which would render it far from impossible that before the end came he may have received the ministrations of some fugitive Catholic priest and have been reconciled to the Church of his forefathers.

With regard to the first of these four points we have to remember that, even down to the end of Elizabeth's reign, the old religion possessed many sympathizers in this part of Warwickshire. Not without reason did the Gunpowder Plot conspirators in 1605 make Clopton House near Stratford their rendezvous. Among those suspected of recusancy in 1592 and again delated, though "heretofore presented," as still continuing to absent themselves from church, we find a "Mr. John Shakespeare." This might no doubt have been John Shakespeare, the

shoemaker, who lived at Stratford at the same time, but he is not commonly designated "Mr." Moreover, the poet's father had undoubtedly married an Arden, and though Mary his wife was only a distant cousin of the Edward Arden executed for his religion in 1583, still the traditions of the family were strongly Catholic. Mrs. C. C. Stopes, whose original investigations entitle her to speak with exceptional authority on Shakespeare's entourage, is also of opinion that Dr. Hall, who married the poet's favorite daughter Susanna, belonged to a Catholic family and for that reason had studied medicine abroad. She sees in any case no ground for attributing to him the pronounced Puritan opinions with which he is sometimes credited. In the practice of his profession he certainly attended many Papists, and even in one case a "Romish priest" for he mentions the fact in his record of cures. Moreover although the point is too complicated for discussion here, the authenticity of the "spiritual testament" of Mr. John Shakespeare found in the house occupied by his daughter has never been disproved. If authentic, the document must certainly establish the fact that the poet's father remained staunch in his Catholicism to the end of his life.

Though thus imbued with Catholic traditions, Shakespeare on coming to London, if not before, pursued courses which could hardly be otherwise than subversive of faith and of moral principles. No one with any practical knowledge of life can seriously put an innocent construction on sundry passages in the sonnets, however much we may admire them as expressions of the poet's genius. Of all the wild theories that have been propounded concerning them none has apparently gone so far as to suggest that they bore any reference to the lady whom he

had married several years before. Moreover it is probably significant that his first printed work "Venus and Adonis" was published by a Stratford man, Richard Field, to whom possibly enough Shakespeare betook himself when first he came to town. Now Field, after an apprenticeship of six years, had succeeded to the business of Thomas Vautrollier, whose daughter he married, and a strongly anti-Catholic, if not anti-Christian, tendency is noticeable in the books, English, French, Latin and Italian, printed at this press. To take one example, Vautrollier in 1584 brought out certain writings of Giordano Bruno for which he had to fly the country. It was possibly through Field that Shakespeare came to take up his quarters with the Huguenot, Mountjoy, in Silver Street, but Dr. Wallace of Nebraska University who recently unearthed this important incident in Shakespeare's life has also disclosed the fact that Mountjoy's debaucheries and irregularities became later on so notorious that he was denounced and cut off from their communion by his own coreligionists. Associates of this kind, not to speak of such men as Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Robert Greene, and others, are hardly consistent with the retention of any deep practical sense of religion, and in the speculations of Hamlet and the farewell of Prospero in the "Tempest," the latest of the plays, there is a prevailing note of agnosticism which it seems to me vain to controvert.

Much has been made of Shakespeare's alleged familiarity with the Bible, but no safe inference can be drawn from it either as regards the first-hand nature of his knowledge or as to the version which he used. In all the Shakespeare plays the only direct quotation of a text of Scripture is strangely enough made in French, (II

Peter, 11: 22, cited by the Dauphin in "Henry V," Act 3, sc. 2) and here both the Genevan and Catholic versions coincided. Dr. Brinsley Nicholson after a careful examination came to the conclusion that Shakespeare made more use of the Latin Vulgate than of any other version! What is more significant is that there is practically no evidence to show that the poet was familiar with the "Book of Common Prayer." His use of the phrase "picking and stealing," which has sometimes been quoted to prove this, establishes nothing, for this collocation of words was proverbial even in the time of Gower. On the other hand, in a multitude of passages, he gives proof of his acquaintance with Catholic doctrine and practice. Even the "evening Mass" difficulty in "Romeo and Juliet" is no indication of ignorance, but must rather be held as attesting a quite remarkable knowledge of the local customs of Verona.

When, therefore, we recall the deep sympathy shown by the dramatist for the Catholic ideals of many of his characters, and when we further note that the passages commonly appealed to in proof of his Protestantism are now generally acknowledged to be of alien authorship, there seems good reason to admit the possibility and even the likelihood of the local tradition recorded by the Anglican clergyman, Richard Davis, that "he died a Papist." That some priest should secretly have ventured to bring the last consolations of religion to the dying poet is not inconsistent either with any known fact in his previous history or with the arrangements carried out by his friends as to the disposal of his remains.